

Message Text

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47

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 HEW-06 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 L-02

NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 SAJ-01 /087 W

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R 031819Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6962

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 00084

PASS DEPT OF LABOR AND HEW

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, UK, SOCI

SUBJECT: DOCTORS REVOLT AGAINST GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE FIRST REALLY THORNY DISPUTE OF THE NEW YEAR WHICH CONFRONTS THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT A TRADITIONAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS QUARREL BUT A THREAT OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY DOCTORS WHICH, IF CARRIED OUT, COULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT BRITISH MEDICAL SERVICES. BARBARA CASTLE, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES, HAS CHARACTERIZED THE DOCTORS' CHALLENGE AS "BLACKMAIL" AND A "CALL FOR ANARCHY." THE ISSUES INVOLVED WHICH HAVE LED TO THE PRESENT CRISIS INCLUDE WAGES, HOURS, THE USE OF

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PRIVATE BEDS IN PUBLIC HOSPITALS AND OTHER MATTERS, BUT

THEY REFLECT A LARGER CONCERN BY DOCTORS -- AND DENTISTS
TOO -- THAT THEY ARE NOT GETTING A FAIR SHARE OF SOCIE-
TY'S REWARDS. END SUMMARY

2. THERE ARE IN FACT SEVERAL DISPUTES WHICH INVOLVE THE
MEDICAL AND DENTAL PROFESSION. ONE OF THEM INVOLVES
HOSPITAL CONSULTANTS -- SOME OF WHOM ARE ALREADY "WORK-
ING TO RULE" BECAUSE THEY ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE NEW
CONTRACTS BEING OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE
(NHS). WHILE THE CONSULTANTS ARE OPPOSED TO SEVERAL
CLAUSES IN THESE CONTRACTS, THEIR MAIN CONCERN IS TO BE
LEFT AT LIBERTY TO PRACTICE PRIVATELY WITHIN THE NHS,
ESPECIALLY BY BEING ALLOWED THE USE OF PRIVATE BEDS FOR
THEIR OUTSIDE PATIENTS. THEY CHARGE THAT THEIR ABILITY
TO PRACTICE PRIVATELY IS BEING UNDERMINED BY THE GOVERN-
MENT'S POLICY OF PHASING OUT THE USE OF THESE PRIVATE
BEDS IN PUBLIC HOSPITALS. (THE PROPOSED CONTRACT, FOR
EXAMPLE, IS WEIGHTED IN FAVOR OF FULL-TIME NHS MEDICAL
CONSULTANTS BY GRANTING THEM AN 18 PERCENT SALARY DIFF-
ERENTIAL OVER PART-TIME CONSULTANTS.)

3. ANOTHER DISPUTE INVOLVES ABOUT 69,000 DOCTORS AND
DENTISTS WHO ARE DEMANDING, THROUGH THE BRITISH MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION AND THE BRITISH DENTAL ASSOCIATION, A LARGE
INTERIM PAY RAISE. A SPECIAL REVIEW BODY ON DOCTORS'
AND DENTISTS' REMUNERATION HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THESE
PROFESSIONALS HAD FALLEN SIGNIFICANTLY BEHIND IN THE
SALARY QUEUE AND HAS RECOMMENDED "SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES"
FOR THEM. HOWEVER, THE REVIEW BODY HAS RECOMMENDED
AGAINST AN INTERIM INCREASE, SUGGESTING INSTEAD INCREASES
FROM APRIL 1ST, THE ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR LAST AWARD, IN
ORDER TO KEEP WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT
(WHOSE GUIDELINES CALL FOR TWELVE MONTH INTERVALS BETWEEN
INCREASES). ANGERED BY THIS DECISION, THESE PRACTITION-
ERS THREATEN TO JOIN HOSPITAL CONSULTANTS IN INDUSTRIAL
ACTION. THEY WILL MEET NEXT THURSDAY (JANUARY 9) TO

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DECIDE FURTHER ACTION.

4. THE HOSPITAL JUNIOR STAFF GROUP COUNCIL, REPRESENTING A THIRD GROUP WORKING IN NHS HOPITALS -- 19,000 JUNIOR DOCTORS -- DECLARED THAT IT WOULD ALSO ENGAGE IN INDUSTRIAL ACTION IF THEIR DEMAND FOR A 40-HOUR WEEK IS NOT MET. (THEY NOW WORK AN 80-HOUR STANDARD WEEK AND ARE SEEKING A 40-HOUR WEEK AS WELL AS SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED OVERTIME PAYMENTS. THEIR REPRESENTATIVES ARE TO MEET WITH MRS. CASTLE NEXT WEDNESDAY (JANUARY 8).

5. ALL OF THESE DISPUTES HAVE KICKED UP A CONSIDERABLE STORM IN THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA AND HAVE UNDERLINED UNCLASSIFIED

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THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN MRS. CASTLE AND THE MEDICAL AND DENTAL PROFESSIONALS. SHE HAS STRONGLY DENIED, HOWEVER, THAT SHE WANTS TO DO AWAY WITH PRIVATE PRACTICE, ALTHOUGH SHE IS ADAMANT IN HER INSISTENCE THAT THERE BE A DIFFERENTIAL FAVORING FULL-TIME CONSULTANTS OF THE NHS AS AGAINST PART-TIMERS, AND IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED SHE WOULD BE INVITING TROUBLE FROM HOSPITAL SERVICE UNIONS IF SHE OVER-RULED THE REVIEW BODY'S STRICTURE AGAINST AN INTERIM AGREEMENT FOR GENERAL MEDICAL AND DENTAL PRACTITIONERS.

6. AN EDITORIAL IN THE LONDON TIMES (JANUARY 3) GIVES SHORT SHRIFT TO THE CONSULTANTS' CHARGE THAT THEIR FREEDOM IS BEING ABRIDGED, THAT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOCTOR AND PATIENT OR 'THAT PRIVATE PRACTICE ITSELF IS BEING THREATENED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS.' IT ALSO NOTES THAT THE PLAN IS NOT BEING FORCED ON ANYBODY." HOWEVER THE 'TIMES' DOES PERHAPS GO TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER WHEN IT STATES: 'EVEN THE WIDER QUESTION OF PAY IS ONLY AN ASPECT OF A PERVADING SENSE OF GRIEVANCE WHICH LARGELY DERIVES FROM A WHOLLY CREDITABLE ANXIETY THAT MEDICAL SERVICES IN BRITAIN ARE EXPLOITED AND UNDERVALUED BY THOSE WHO MAKE THE POLITICAL DECISIONS ABOUT THE ALLOCATION OF THE NATIONAL WEALTH WHETHER THIS 'PERVADING SENSE OF GRIEVANCE.' IS TOTALLY JUSTIFIED BY THE FACTORS OR NOT, IT EXISTS AND WILL CONTINUE TO PLAGUE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDICAL AND DENTAL PROFESSIONS FOR SOME TIME TO COME -- QUITE APART FROM THE RESOLUTION OF THE CURRENT CRISIS. SPIERS

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